

20 Reproves and Warns the Princes.

He cannot, however, be accused of servility towards the princely order. Though he exaggerated the office of princes, he did not on occasion spare their persons, as a Duke George of Saxony, a Henry VIII. of England, found to their astonishment when they took to controversy with the intrepid theologian. Luther could "drub" a king as well as a pope who had the presumption to contradict his teaching. To this dogmatic nature a king or a duke who did so was "a liar," "an ass," or worse, and an ass should not take to reading the Psalter! Every opponent of Luther is the devil in person, and deserves nothing but cursing. And this not merely in a moment of fierce controversy. The prince rules by divine right, he insists in his tract "On the secular Power and how far obedience is due to it" (1523), "but from the beginning of the world an intelligent prince has been a rare bird, and a pious one a still rarer. They are usually the 'greatest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth.' And let them take warning, for times have ominously changed. 'The common man is becoming intelligent, . . . he will not, cannot suffer your tyranny and arbitrariness for ever.' Nevertheless, he preaches subordination to these 'fools and scoundrels' by divine right, and will only permit their victims the right to differ from them in matters of conscience, while suffering in patience for the privilege of being ruled by imbecility or rascality divinely established. 'Christians may not resist, but suffer, though they shall not approve or serve.' For these fools and scoundrels, by divine right, as for the pope and the bishop, he reserves the wrath of God, not of man. In so doing, he certainly did not know human nature.

If his attitude to the pope and the spirit of his earlier writings seemed to bring him into line with the aristocratic party of revolution on the one hand, his teaching undoubtedly lent an impulse to democratic revolution on the other. Luther became a popular hero in these early years of his struggle with Rome. In the popular literature of the day the peasant usually takes the side of the reformer against the local parson, and even against Eck, Mirner, Cochlaeus, and others of Luther's antagonists, whose names are parodied into Geek, Murr-narr, Kochloeffel. The peasant has evidently 'become a theologian, and puts the parson to the rout with